



Education Select Committee report on careers guidance for young people: Careers England policy commentary 18.

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Careers England Policy Commentary 18

This is the eighteenth in an occasional series of briefing notes on key policy documents related to the future of career guidance services in England. The note has been prepared for Careers England by Professor Tony Watts.

Education Select Committee Report on Careers Guidance for Young People

A.G. Watts

1. The report of the Education Select Committee on careers guidance for young people¹ is a powerful report: cogently argued, well evidenced, and with strong recommendations on the need for significant changes in current Government policies.
2. The report states unequivocally that ‘The Government’s decision to transfer responsibility for careers guidance to schools is regrettable’:

‘International evidence suggests such a model does not deliver the best provision for young people. The weaknesses of the school-based model have been compounded by the failure to transfer to schools any budget with which to provide the service. This has led, predictably, to a drop in the overall level of provision’ (para.31).

On the other hand, it acknowledges the political constraints:

‘... we recognise that the new responsibility is now in place and further change would lead to greater uncertainty and upheaval, with a detrimental impact on young people’ (para.32).

It accordingly frames its core recommendations judiciously within these constraints:

‘Whilst funding remains a concern, schools need to make careers guidance a priority within their budgets and we do not, in the current financial climate, recommend that additional funding be provided directly to schools. We believe that, instead, urgent steps must be taken by the Government to ensure that the current settlement meets the needs of young people. More precisely, we believe that the situation could be rescued by a combination of improved accountability and an enhancement of the role of the National Careers Service, including additional funding for that’ (para.32).

¹ House of Commons Education Committee (2013). *Careers Guidance for Young People: the Impact of the New Duty on Schools*. HC 632-1. London: Stationery Office.

3. There are two core sets of recommendations. The first is that the Statutory Guidance² and Practical Guide³ for schools be combined in a single document, and revised⁴ to require schools to:

- (a) Ensure that ‘a minimum of one careers interview with an independent adviser who is not a teacher should be available for every young person’ (para.81) (making it clear that ‘the signposting of independent websites is insufficient to meet their statutory duty’ (para.86)).
- (b) ‘Achieve the Quality in Careers Standard; secure independent careers guidance from a provider with the Matrix standard; and ensure that advice is provided by a level 6 qualified careers advisers [sic]’ (para.105).
- (c) ‘Provide careers education and work-related learning as part of their duty’ (para.109).
- (d) ‘Publish an annual careers plan, to include information on the support and resources available to its pupils in planning their career development’; and ‘to review the plan systematically on an annual basis, taking into account the views of students, parents, employers and other learning providers’ (para.63).
- (e) Include within this annual careers plan ‘details of the alternative providers [of educational pathways] they allow to meet with their pupils, including the name of the provider and the nature of the contact’ (para.90).
- (f) Include within the careers plan ‘their arrangements with local employers and how they intend to enhance them’ (para.93).

In addition, the report recommends that the Statutory Guidance should:

- (g) Emphasise the benefits of ‘the efforts made by some local authorities to support their schools in taking on the new duty, particularly by working with them to form consortia and partnerships to procure independent and impartial careers guidance’ (para.46).
- (h) Reflect more strongly the benefits of ‘a collaborative approach [between schools] to commissioning careers guidance services’, particularly in ‘promoting consistency and quality and in realising economies of scale’ (para.49).

4. The second core recommendation is to extend the remit of the National Careers Service (NCS) to schools:

² Department for Education (2012). *The Education Act 2011: the Duty to Secure Independent and Impartial Careers Guidance for Young People in Schools: Statutory Guidance for Head Teachers, School Staff, Governing Bodies and Local Authorities*.

³ Department for Education (2012). *Securing Independent Careers Guidance: a Practical Guide for Schools*.

⁴ Revisions are required in any case, in order to take account of the Government’s decision to extend the duty down to year 8 and up to 16-18-year-olds in schools. See Department for Education & Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2012). *Consultation on Extending Access to Independent Careers Guidance: Summary of Consultation Responses*.

‘We recommend that the remit of the National Careers Service is expanded to enable it to perform a capacity-building and brokerage role for schools. As part of its capacity building role, the National Careers Service should work with individual schools in designing their annual careers plan of provision for careers guidance as well as provide schools with local labour market information’ (para.74).

The NCS role should also include a duty to promote to schools the benefits of working to the quality standards outlined in 3b above (para.105), and should support schools in enabling teachers

‘to have a greater understanding of the world of work, particularly that of the local labour market, and ... [to] undertake regular professional development to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the work place’ (para.100).

The report recognises that:

‘Clearly, this would have funding implications and so we further recommend that the Department of Education instructs the Skills Funding Agency to cost the options of the National Careers Service remit being expanded in this way’ (para.74).

5. On the requirement for a minimum of one **careers interview** for all young people (3a above), the report is clear that ‘access to face-to-face guidance is an integral part of good quality careers guidance’ (para.81). Online information is viewed as being valuable but not capable of replacing face-to-face guidance (para.86). The report notes that these points were endorsed by the vast majority of the evidence submitted to the committee, including the views of young people as expressed in various forms including a seminar with young people organised by the Committee (reported in detail in Annex 2 to the report). Also, while acknowledging the important role that teachers play in guiding and advising young people, it recognises ‘the constraints they are under and that they cannot substitute for fully-qualified, independent and impartial advisers’ (para.99), and recommends that the careers interview specified should be from the latter.

6. On the **quality standards** (3b above), the Committee endorses the ‘three-pronged approach’ promoted by Careers England and others. It notes however that at present schools are free to make use of these standards or not as they wish. It views this permissive approach as inadequate, and recommends a firm requirement to implement the standards. Accordingly, schools would now be required ‘to work towards the Quality in Careers Standard, and to procure guidance services only from qualified providers and individuals’ (Summary, p.3).

7. On **careers education and work-related learning** (3c above), too, the report views the Government’s current permissive stance as inadequate. It establishes the distinctive role of these programmes, distinguished from ‘careers guidance’, in a

‘terminology’ section early in the report (para.17).⁵ It notes that the dispensing of the statutory duty to provide work-related learning in Key Stage 4 had been implemented despite 89% of consultation respondents rejecting this step, and that the statutory duty to provide careers education had been removed without any public consultation at all (para.106). It recommends that both be effectively reinstated, within the revised Statutory Guidance.

8. On **accountability** (3d above), the report quotes the responsible Minister (Matthew Hancock) as stating to the Committee that the Government are

‘giving, as in many other areas, the responsibility to schools, but then, crucially, holding them to account to deliver on it’ (para.24).

The Committee is clear, however, that both of the two accountability mechanisms identified by the Government for this purpose – the Ofsted inspection framework and destination measures – are inadequate. Regarding Ofsted, it notes the ‘disconnect’ between the Government’s view and Ofsted’s own view as expressed to the Committee – notably Ofsted’s clear indication

‘that its inspections do not make a clear judgement on careers guidance provision in schools, that it does not inspect against statutory compliance in this area and that it does not routinely inspect all schools’ (para.56).

Regarding destination measures, it points out that:

‘Measures taken too soon do not provide a complete picture while those taken later remove the direct accountability on schools, as other factors may have influenced an individual’s destination. Furthermore, the measures do not show the quality of the careers guidance provision in a school’ (para.59).

It accordingly views other mechanisms as essential, and opts for the approach adopted in Finland and Ontario (Canada) of requiring schools to publish and seek feedback on an annual careers plan. This

‘would allow transparency about what could be expected in terms of career work (including careers education, guidance and information) and would set out the internal and external resources allocated to these activities’ (para.61).

It notes that when asked about this in oral evidence, the Minister had not been opposed to this suggestion and had confirmed his willingness to consider it (para.62).

⁵ This contrasts with the conspicuous omission of the term ‘careers education’, and its replacement by ‘activities’, in recent Government statements. See Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 15B (Final Version): The Coalition Government’s Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, para.26.

9. On **impartiality** (3e-f above), the report expresses grave concern about the evidence of schools resisting access to other education providers and to employers, in order to promote their own learning provision, so advancing their own institutional interests at the expense of the interests of young people. It again views transparency in the careers plan as the means to address this issue.

10. On the role of **local authorities** and of **consortia and partnerships** (3g-h above), the report recognises the benefits of schools working together, and commends the supportive roles being performed by some local authorities (including Bradford, which was visited by the Committee). The report does not address the issues posed in this respect by the growing number of schools which are now academies, and therefore outside the control of local authorities. It further notes the continuing responsibilities of local authorities in relation to targeted services for vulnerable young people, but expresses concern that ‘there appears to be too much variation in local authorities’ interpretation of what constitutes a targeted group’: accordingly, it recommends that

‘the Department for Education promotes the activities of the best performing local authorities so that best practice in identifying and delivering services to targeted young people is shared’ (para.115).

In relation to such young people, the report also recommends that

‘the Government ensures that discussions take place between local authorities and the regional Youth Contract providers about the delivery of the Youth Contract on a local level’ (para.121).

11. On the **remit of the NCS** (4 above), the Committee addresses two possible models – service delivery and capacity building – acknowledging that both would require additional Government funding. The first of these

‘would meet the need for independent and impartial advice. It would also, to a certain extent, represent a move back to the Careers Service model that existed prior to Connexions and would be more expensive’ (para.71).

The second option

‘would harness both the NCS’s expertise in careers guidance and its understanding of local employment and learning opportunities. It would involve the NCS producing a regular information stream on the labour and learning market, brokering employer/education activities and supporting schools in the development of their own careers programmes. Such a capacity-building and brokerage model would be flexible; it could be shaped to individual schools’ needs and requirements; and it would be less costly than the first model’ (para.71).

It notes that in an earlier report⁶ the Committee favoured an all-age service (i.e. the NCS) being funded by the Department for Education to provide face-to-face career guidance to young people, and stated that its view on this had not changed. However:

‘given the statutory duty has only recently been passed to schools, we believe that the best way of delivering the Government’s vision and providing the service that young people need is through the capacity building and brokerage model’ (para.72).

12. On the **funding** required, the report states:

‘We have not carried out our own research into the cost of extending the remit of the NCS. Careers England estimated that creating a capacity-building and brokerage role would be around £120 million per annum.⁷ While this is clearly a significant sum, we believe that it should be weighed against the likely cost for the nation of young people making the wrong choices as a result of a deficiency in the careers guidance service. The estimates should, of course, be checked thoroughly’ (para.73).

It is important to note that the proposed £120 million represents a considerable net saving to the Department for Education, when compared with the £196 million previously spent on the careers guidance element of Connexions.⁸ At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that it leaves the responsibility for funding the service-delivery element with schools, within their existing budgets.

13. Overall, this is a strong report. It requires significant action from the Government, but within the framework of its existing policies.

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⁶ House of Commons Education Committee (2011). *Participation by 16-19 Year Olds in Education and Training*, para.156. HC 850-1. London: Stationery Office.

⁷ The basis for this estimate, as submitted to the Committee, is 4,000 secondary schools @ £30,000 per school.

⁸ Watts, A.G. (2012). *Careers England Policy Commentary 15B (Final Version): The Coalition Government’s Emerging Policies on Career Guidance*, para.43.